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Harvard to move engineering, science school to Allston

By **Matt Rocheleau** | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT | FEBRUARY 07, 2013

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Harvard University plans to move a “substantial majority” of its School of Engineering and Applied Sciences from its main campus in Cambridge to its expanding campus in Allston, university President Drew G. Faust announced.

The school would relocate to the planned science center complex, which is expected to be completed by 2017, university officials said. Work on the massive building was put on hold about three years ago, but the university plans to resume construction there next year.

The school’s relocation represents a shift in the types of programming the science center will house.

The university’s plan for the center, which had already been significantly altered once from the original concept that was approved in 2007, “evolved” again over the past few months and now calls for the School

of Engineering and Applied Sciences to become “an anchoring presence” of the complex, Faust told faculty of the school Tuesday night.

Prior versions of the plan, the most recent of which was outlined by Harvard this past summer, called for stem-cell research to be an “anchor component” of the complex alongside programs in engineering and the physical, biological, and life sciences.

University officials said life sciences, which includes stem-cell sciences, will remain an integral part of the complex, but to a lesser extent than previously planned.

This week’s announcement was the first time the university said publicly that a portion of the School of Engineering and Applied Sciences would move there. Faust said that the complex would also house “a significant area of flexible lab space dedicated to cross faculty collaborations and experiments.”

The building is still planned to be between 500,000 and 600,000 square feet housing a state-of-the-art health and life sciences laboratory, research, classrooms, and areas to foster collaborative innovation. Stefan Behnisch will resume his role as project architect.

“We regard this as an extraordinary opportunity for SEAS,” she said Tuesday, according to a copy of her remarks provided by the university. “The school must grow—more faculty, more space, more resources. The Allston plan is meant to make that possible. And it is meant to establish SEAS—perhaps the most collaborative of any Harvard school—as a hub in a wheel of connectivity that is meant to define and shape the new Allston adventure.”

The School of Engineering and Applied Sciences includes about 575 undergraduate and 375 graduate students, 400 researchers, 125 staff and 70 full-time faculty who study, teach and work across about 400,000 square feet of building space on the university’s main campus in Harvard Square, the school’s website says.

In 2007, it officially became its own school. Before that it was a division of the university, but its roots at Harvard trace back to 1847, when the Lawrence Scientific School was founded.

University officials said Wednesday they have not yet determined what will take over the space in Cambridge currently used by the School of Engineering and Applied Sciences.

Some faculty expressed a mix of surprise and concern Tuesday night about the planned move, according to Harvard Magazine and the Harvard Crimson. Allston residents had similar reactions in messages on a neighborhood e-mail list.

Some worried that the university was not acting transparently enough or seeking enough outside input to make the decision.

But, Harvard spokeswoman Christine Heenan said Wednesday that “the planning is just commencing.”

She said both faculty and residential input will be important moving forward.

A meeting between the community, the Boston Redevelopment Authority and Harvard officials is scheduled for Wednesday night.

The city redevelopment authority approved the building’s original design in 2007 after a two-and-a-half year public review process.

“If there are changes to Harvard’s approved science complex that could trigger a new community process and require new BRA approval,” Melina Schuler, a spokeswoman for the city agency, said Wednesday in an e-mail.

“Harvard’s announcement is a positive step towards resuming construction at the stalled Allston science complex, which is important to Mayor Menino and the neighborhood,” she added.

Faust acknowledged that moving the school would involve some “challenges.”

“SEAS must sustain its identity with the college and with undergraduates,” she said. “Important collaborations with other faculty in Cambridge must be enabled and supported. A great deal of thought and ingenuity must be devoted to issues of transportation, connectivity, scheduling. That is central to the work that lies ahead, work that I’m sure the problem-solving engineers of SEAS can do much to advance.”

“Today we still speak of Allston and Cambridge,” Faust said. “Those who follow us will regard it as one campus for one university. We should think and talk about it in those terms.”

The university’s presence and development plans in Allston have been rife with controversies.

Harvard began pushing for an expansion in Allston in the late 1980s. In 1997, the school revealed it had spent \$88 million to covertly buy 52 acres of land in the neighborhood, drawing an outcry from residents and Boston Mayor Thomas M. Menino.

The university agreed to pay the city millions in lieu of taxes for its exempt property and tried to reshape

its image as a good neighbor.

But Harvard continued to buy land and now owns 359 acres in Allston, nearly double the size of its Cambridge campus.

In late 2003, Harvard envisioned a massive 250-acre campus in Allston that included academic space, student housing, entertainment facilities, and the transformation of Barry's Corner to replicate Harvard Square.

At the heart of the first phase of that 50-year plan was a 589,000 square-foot science center estimated to cost \$1 billion.

The complex's foundation was built, but in late 2009 construction was put on hold indefinitely as the university's endowment was rocked by the recession, diving \$11 billion, or 27 percent.

In the spring of 2011, the university began its first major project since then: a \$20 million investment to convert a building into a laboratory for innovation and entrepreneurship. It opened that fall.

A month later, the university broke ground on a \$100 million building that will be used primarily for housing on its business school campus. It is scheduled to open later this year.

As those two projects moved forward, Harvard announced it would take a dramatically different approach to expanding in Allston by dividing its vision into smaller projects and working with outside developers and investors in an effort to ease the university's financial risk.

The university announced this past summer that it expects to resume work on the science complex next year. The building would contain between 500,000 and 600,000 square feet of space for a state-of-the-art health and life sciences laboratory, research, classrooms, and areas to foster collaborative innovation, officials have said.

This past fall, Harvard unveiled a 10-year master plan framework for Allston, featuring nine new projects, including a new basketball arena, a refurbished football stadium, a hotel and conference center, and new business school buildings.

In December, a private developer unveiled detailed plans to build a 350,000-square-foot retail and residential development on land owned by Harvard in Barry's Corner. That proposal is under city review. The developer hopes to start construction on the two-year project this coming fall.

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